

THE WAVE: NATIONAL MARITIME CENTER NEWSLETTER

The Captain's Corner

You've all heard the stories before. The poor service provided at the Driver's License Office, the lack of customer service by many government agencies, the rude behavior of a convenience store clerk. No doubt you've all heard stories from mariners about the poor service they received during a license or document transaction. I can tell you from personal experience about the poor service I received when renewing my license.

A key aspect of the MLD restructuring and centralization project is to improve customer service. Whether you work at the counter in a REC, administer exams, work in the call center, conduct evaluations, or approve training courses, our aim is to delight the customers we serve. I expect your daily interactions with our customers to be guided by our core values, which parallel the Coast Guard's core values. Our core values are:

- Honor the mariner and their experience.
- Respect the mariner's time, get it right the first time.
- Respect the mariner's personal information, protect it.
- Devotion to Duty - value the mariner's suggestions for continuous improvement.

Put yourself in the shoes of the mariner and think of how you would like to be treated. Then act accordingly. Behavior inconsistent with this and our core values is unacceptable.

One of the best ways to tell if our customers are pleased with the level of service we are providing is to review the comments they provide on the customer satisfaction surveys and in unsolicited letters and emails.

Enclosed with this edition of The Wave is a summary of the testimonials we've received from delighted mariners and marine industry representatives. Their comments are a sure sign that many of you are adhering to our core values! Keep up the good work.

What you do each day is being noticed and appreciated by our customers. Thank you for your dedication to improving our mission, maintaining our core values, and for your hard work in moving us towards achieving our vision.

Regards,
Captain David C. Stalfort
Commanding Officer



GOV Dana Auquillard, NMC-5
GOV Shane C. Britton, NMC-5
CTR Christina Hardin, NMC-3
CTR Priscilla Oliver, NMC-3
CTR Elizabeth Trout, NMC-5

A warm welcome to NMC West Virginia!

Farewell:

Deborah (Dee) Holland-Thomas, NMC-0, is
now at CG HQ. Good luck!

Staffing Updates

Merchant Marine Evaluation Specialist
GS 12, NMC-5, Closing Date March 7th

Administrative Assistant
GS 8, NMC-0, Closing Date Feb. 26th

See USA Jobs <http://www.usajobs.gov/>
Search: Homeland Security, US Coast Guard

NMC staffing 73 % of full strength





RECorner

REC Chiefs and Academy Liaisons participated in a workgroup at the NMC January 28 – 30 to create a model system for processing maritime academy applications and issuing credentials to graduates of maritime schools and academies. The objective of the meeting was to use existing best practices as much as possible, and create new ones when necessary. A standard set of common NMC-wide processes will enable qualified students to receive their MMD licenses at graduation.

Highlights of the application processing procedures include:

- Designating a school liaison to work together with the students and the NMC on the application process
- Developing a yearly timeline with processing milestones
- Creating standardized checklists for student qualifications and training requirements
- Creating systems to evaluate student physicals and drug test results, and collect fingerprints and verify student identities
- Establishing a testing schedule for the RECs' Traveling Exam Teams, and setting the policies for student re-test procedures

There are seven major maritime schools in the United States: US Merchant Marine Academy, Kings Point, NY; State University of New York Maritime College, Throggs Neck, New York; Maine Maritime Academy, Castine, Maine; Massachusetts Maritime Academy, Buzzards Bay, Massachusetts; Great Lakes Maritime Academy, Traverse City, Michigan; California Maritime Academy, Vallejo, California; and Texas Maritime Academy, Galveston, Texas. Some of these schools have several graduation ceremonies each year, and the number of graduates can range from 5 to 300, depending on the school. Many graduates begin their maritime careers within days of graduation, so timely receipt of the MMD credential is critical.

The workgroup was a success. The outcomes will help ensure the application processing for the maritime academies follows the NMC's mission to provide mariner credentials in an efficient and timely manner. The standard process will be documented in the REC Transition Book, which will be distributed to all RECs.

Personnel from CQ HQ, NMC-0, NMC-1, NMC-2, and NMC-5 participated in the workgroup.

REC Attendees

REC Boston: Nick Petronzio and Doreen Parent

REC Houston: Angela Borroum and Christine Camacho

REC New York: LCDR Rob Mutto, Ken Skuches & Rhonda Booker

REC San Francisco: George Buffleben and John Breeden

REC Toledo: Al Campolongo and Earl Bibbee



CDR Swirbliss, Division Chief of NMC-1, has announced that **Mr. Ken Skuches** has accepted the position of Branch Chief of NMC-11, the REC Operations Branch, effective March 30, 2008. Mr. Skuches is currently the Assistant Senior Inspector of Personnel (ASIP) for REC New York.

REC Transition Book and Schedules

In the near future the REC Transition Book and the REC Transition Schedule will be distributed to the RECs. Toledo, St. Louis, Memphis, and Los Angeles/Long Beach will receive them first. Baltimore, New Orleans, Anchorage, and Juneau will be the next group. Remaining RECs will be sent these documents a few weeks prior to their scheduled transition start date.

The REC Transition Book provides guidance on transition procedures and post-transition work processes. The Transition Book incorporates the results of the November 2007 and January 2008 REC Team meetings.

The schedules are in Excel format, and will be placed in a shared public folder available to the RECs via the network. RECs will update the schedules bi-weekly beginning the second Thursday after their start date and continuing every two weeks until their transition is complete. A more detailed set of instructions will be provided via email to each REC Chief.

REC Toledo and REC St. Louis Transition to NMC

On February 4, 2008, the Regional Examination Centers located in Toledo, Ohio and St. Louis, Missouri began their transition to become field units of the National Maritime Center (NMC), located in Martinsburg, West Virginia. REC Toledo and REC St. Louis will start operating as a storefront operation where the staff will help the mariner ensure their application is ready for evaluation. Once complete, the RECs will send the application to the NMC for evaluation. The NMC will conduct an entire evaluation, including security, professional qualification, and medical. Mariners will still need to verify their identity, get fingerprinted and take their tests at the REC. Once the applicant is found to be fully qualified, the credential will be printed and issued by the NMC.

REC Toledo and REC St. Louis will be joining four other RECs, who have already transitioned: REC Anchorage, Alaska; REC Baltimore, Maryland; REC Juneau, Alaska; and, REC New Orleans, Louisiana. By the end of this calendar year, all 17 RECs nationwide will have transitioned to NMC field units.

The future role of the transitioned RECs will be primarily that of a mariner advocate. As the "face" of the Coast Guard to the mariner, it is essential that they help the mariner complete the application and ensure it is ready to be evaluated before forwarding the application to the NMC.

The goal of the restructuring and centralization effort is to improve customer service, decrease credential processing time, and improve the consistency of our products. In the future, it is envisioned that credentials will be issued faster and the level of customer service will exceed the mariner's expectations.



NMC Mariner Licensing and Documentation (MLD) Website Update

The NMC MLD website <http://www.uscg.mil/stcw/> is a product of NMC-4, the Mariner Information Division. Maintaining the MLD website content and improving the website functionality is keeping the web team busy. The website contains hundreds of files that provide the site's content. These files are constantly updated as information changes. The uniform resource locator (URL) contained in many files and menus must be updated and verified, particularly where they point to data outside the MLD website. For example, much of the Training and Examination data is in the process of being updated and re-organized for better access and presentation. In some cases, the data or links are reorganized for better functionality or better maintainability. These activities are performed behind the scenes, since the goal is constant availability to the mariner. LT Hilary Stickle in the NMC Mariner Information Division is responsible for the MLD website. Her goal is to ensure the MLD website provides easy access to MLD information and answers mariner questions. The MLD website usage has been increasing, attesting to the value of this resource.

NMC Divisions and Functions

NMC – 1 Operations and Oversight Division

The Operations and Oversight Division is responsible for the oversight and management of the 17 RECs and the 3 Monitoring Units; the dissemination of program policy, guidance, and procedures; and internal quality assurance associated with the operational and technical aspects of the mariner credentialing program. The Division is comprised of the REC Operations Branch to which all field elements report, a Planning Branch, and a Quality Assurance and Training Branch. The primary duties include:

- Performing the long-range planning function for the command.
- Ensuring delivery of required training to program personnel.
- Developing recommendations for the best use of assigned Reserve and contractor personnel and available Coast Guard Auxiliary support.
- Assisting in conducting an active outreach program.
- Overseeing the effective operation of the RECs in the accomplishment of all MLD program mission objectives and goals.
- Serving as the interface between the RECs and the NMC staff components for needs beyond routine day-to-day operations.
- Ensuring the implementation of policies, standards, and procedures for the orderly processing of all applications for mariner credentials.
- Developing training on the interpretation and application of changing regulatory and statutory authority.
- Assisting in administering the Mission Management System (Quality Standards System), and coordinate and perform internal audits of MLD program operations in accordance with ISO 9001:2000 requirements.
- Participating in external audits and coordinating responses to audit reports involving the MLD program.

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NMC – 2 Mariner Training and Assessment Division

The Mariner Training and Assessment Division performs the approval and oversight of effective training courses for mariners and develops examinations of knowledge-based competency of applicants. The Division's oversight program ensures that persons and agencies providing services that fulfill requirements related to the eligibility for issuance of mariner credentials are performing their duties in a manner that meets all regulatory and policy standards. The Division is comprised of a Course Approval Branch, an Examination Branch, and a Course Oversight Branch. The primary duties include:

- Evaluating and approving new or proposed merchant mariner training courses to determine whether they satisfy a regulatory requirement, substitute for a Coast Guard examination, or substitute for a portion of sea service requirements.
- Reviewing instructor and examiner candidate qualifications, including experience, training, and mariner licenses and documents held, to determine if the candidate has the expertise necessary to instruct or assess in the proposed field.
- Developing test questions and assembling mariner examinations. In cases where examination questions are protested, this division reviews the question and commentary on the submitted protest sheet and determines the validity of the protest.
- Overseeing training programs to ensure compliance with the course approval letter and ensuring that seafarers are provided training that meets the requirements. Oversight audits are performed to verify that courses meet Coast Guard requirements.
- Monitoring and supporting the functions performed by the REC Course Oversight Auditors.
- Determining that only qualified instructors teach the approved courses and that only designated examiners conduct performance evaluations of mariner skills and abilities.

NMC – 3 Program Support Division

The Program Support Division is responsible for the centralized management of the financial, administrative, and infrastructure requirements of the NMC and the RECs. The Division is comprised of a Finance Branch, an Administration Branch and an Information Technology Services Branch. The primary duties of this Division are:

- Overseeing the general administration of the command and its field units, including personnel actions, command doctrine development and coordination, physical and personnel security requirements, facility/property management, management of command files, and upkeep of government vehicles.
- Ensuring adherence to the requirements of the Coast Guard budgetary process.
- Managing the expenditure of all allocated funds including the procurement of supplies and equipment, contracting, and travel for the NMC and the RECs.
- Providing mail room services.
- Coordinating information technology services for the NMC and RECs.
- Supporting the development of new technologies.

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NMC – 4 Mariner Information Division

The Mariner Information Division is responsible for all activities involved in the management of mariner information for the MLD program in the processing of mariner credential applications, maintenance of official mariner records, and information exchanges with other agencies and the public. This Division serves as the functional expert in performing specialized activities associated with planning, developing, and directing an efficient and effective mariner information management system. This Division is comprised of an Application Quality Assurance Branch, a Records Management Branch, and a Data Management Branch. The primary duties of this Division are:

- Coordinating with other agencies and industry to ensure compatibility, acceptance, and integration of the merchant mariner credential with other credential programs, and applicable domestic and international standards.
- Conducting quality assurance checks of all mariner credential applications to ensure completeness and ready for evaluation status.
- Maintaining credential stock production materials, and producing and issuing merchant mariner credentials to all applicants determined to be qualified by the Mariner Evaluation Division.
- Developing and managing an electronic application system.
- Managing the MLD Program internet outreach content and information websites.
- Planning and directing methods of organizing and managing official mariner records in an effective and economical manner, and designing records management systems for collecting, organizing, and categorizing mariner records to facilitate their preservation, retrieval, use, and disposition in accordance with Coast Guard and Department of Homeland Security records management programs and policy.
- Managing the recording of shipping articles and certificates of discharges for seamen.
- Responding to Freedom of Information Act requests, Congressional inquiries and other mariner-information related correspondence.
- Researching and qualifying merchant mariners, as required, for veteran status and benefits, and issuing official certificates to qualified mariners and/or their representatives.
- Serving on the Configuration Control Board and overseeing the management of the Merchant Mariner Licensing and Documentation database (MMLD), including system change requests and overall functionality and maintenance requirements.

NMC – 5 Mariner Evaluation Division

The Mariner Evaluation Division is responsible for performing the major application evaluation functions, each essential and distinct. There are three Branches: (1) the Safety & Security Evaluation Branch, (2) the Medical Evaluation Branch, and (3) the Professional Qualifications Evaluation Branch. In addition to the three branches, there is a Mariner Information Branch, which operates a call center designed to field questions from the public and applicants for merchant mariner credentials.

The **Safety & Security Evaluation Branch** is responsible for the screening, investigating and drug test result verification of all MMC applicants. The Branch is comprised of an Investigations Team and a Screening Team.

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The primary duties of the **Safety & Security Evaluation Branch** are:

- Directing and performing the safety and security screening evaluation function by examining mariner applications, investigating any identified criminal records, and making determinations on the suitability of applicants to work in the maritime industry; and, when appropriate and necessary, denying the issuance of a credential to an applicant.
- Verifying the citizenship of applicants and, if appropriate, providing determinations of permanent residency given the evidence provided by applicants.
- Examining drug test results and ensuring drug test letters are authentic and compare in content to published standards described in the Code of Federal Regulations, Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circulars, and Marine Safety Manual.
- Developing case evidence and information packages for referral to Field Investigating Officers for further action.
- Maintaining required liaison and coordination with CG-2/Assistant Commandant for Intelligence and Criminal Investigations, the Coast Guard Investigative Service (CGIS), and relevant law enforcement agencies.

The **Medical Evaluation Branch** is the authoritative component of the NMC for determining the suitability of MMC applicants from a medical standpoint. The primary duties of this Branch are:

- Evaluating the physical condition of applicants against the published standards found in the Code of Federal Regulations, Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circulars, and Marine Safety Manual; and, when appropriate and necessary, denying the issuance of a credential to an applicant.
- Determining, in instances when physical standards are not met by an applicant, whether a waiver of the standard is practical and what if any conditions and parameters should be imposed to accommodate and monitor the applicant if a credential is issued.
- Serving as the MLD program's principal resource on all matters that pertain to merchant mariner medical certification issues.
- Supporting the administration of a Merchant Mariner Medical Advisory Committee when established.

The **Professional Qualifications Evaluation Branch** performs the core assessment of applicants' qualifications for the issuance of credentials, and is the final control measure to ensure that applications have been comprehensively evaluated and that all matters have been properly addressed before the production and issuance of credentials. The Branch is comprised of two sections, each with teams of mariner compliance specialists. The primary duty of this Branch is interpreting and applying laws, statutes, regulations, policies and international conventions in conducting the evaluation of applicants' professional; and, when appropriate and necessary, denying the issuance of a credential to an applicant.

The **Mariner Information Branch** operates a call center, which receives and responds to inquiries from mariners and the public concerning the application process, status of pending applications, and all other concerns related to the processing of merchant mariner credentials.



CUSTOMER TESTIMONIALS

The following is a sampling of the comments we've received from mariners about their experience with a license or MMD transaction. As you can see from the comments below, the improvements being implemented nationwide are working.

05 FEB 08

U.S.C.G. Baltimore, MD initiated my renewal package and I was impressed on the change they have at the customer service window. Everybody had answered my questions and my application for renewal was completed in a short time. The electronic fingerprinting process also amazed me that it is already directly connected to the NMC in West Virginia. Baltimore's facilities and area are very clean and provided a comfortable place for applicants.

Another thing that impressed me was the issuance of my MMD and COR. I was told that it will take 2 to 8 weeks and mine was issued within the time frame. Very impressive processing and very convenient and reliable website to check the status of applications, and which I used to verify my application.

I am a very satisfied mariner, so to speak, with regards to my MMD and COR renewal. I hope USCG Baltimore and NMC, West Virginia will continue providing outstanding service.

Sincerely,
Cornelia Beriones

01 FEB 08

Great Service when I arrived, friendly atmosphere and in less than three weeks I had my new license in hand!

Thanks,
Charles C. Jenkins

01 FEB 08

Our members in all regions have commented to me on how impressed they are with your approach to solving the problem and with the very common-sense solutions you are implementing. It gives them great confidence that we are finally on the path toward an enduring solution to the critical problem of issuing mariner credentials effectively and efficiently.

Tom Allegretti,
President and Chief Executive Officer
The American Waterway Operators

11 DEC 07

I have had a license for 32 years. This is the first time I have been treated so well. I have to say the New Orleans office was the worst I had experienced and always dreaded it. This time was a joy. Very, very good. I could not be more pleased

Thank you very much.
David C. Feaghy

Continued

Customer Testimonials, Continued

13 SEP 2007

I wanted to pass on to you how impressed we were with the changes at the NMC. The progress to date is wonderful and the plans for the future are very exciting. There is really no better way to put this than to repeat the comment I made yesterday that if you keep going at this rate, we will have run out of things to complain about.

Ken Wells

President

Offshore Marine Service Association

18 AUG 07

Personnel I dealt with at the NMC were always kind, courteous and professional at all times. Your staff should be recognized for a job well done. I would like to take this opportunity to say Thank You very much to the NMC staff for their help and professionalism.

VR,

John Pacheco

29 MAY 2007

Having my file transferred out of Miami and over to you has been a great blessing! Your office works 'par' with what we mariners need and wished to have. Your staff is a dream 'come true'. Miami used to ask us to use the postal service ONLY for questions, etc. Your office staff actually answers the phone, and are knowledgeable enough to have answers.

What usually takes 6 to 8 months in Miami, only took a couple of weeks with you. Thank you, good work, keep it up!

Kind Regards,

Capt. Carlos F. Barnes

20 APR 07

For whatever reason, these were the nicest, most helpful people I've ever dealt with. I was able to speak with a Human, I received prompt call backs. Everyone I talked to was pleasant and helpful, especially the lady that handled my application. Large government agency's that are responsive are so rare now days; I felt I had to write.

Sincerely,

Mike McCall

07 MAR 07

It is my distinct pleasure to commend you on your unparalleled support in providing direct technical expertise in processing my credentials into becoming a mariner. This recognition is given in acknowledgement of your superior professional performance and quality work standards that you so well exemplify and to which I admire.

Through your demonstration of professionalism and outstanding performance, you have earned my admiration and my pleasure to acknowledge your accomplishments. "Well Done!"

A.G. Caacbay



Customer Testimonials, Continued

4 FEB 07

I began the process of receiving my enclosed z-card in January 07 and received the card in March 07. I know it was delayed due to the transfer of my files to the WV facility. The employees of the WV facility were very helpful and kept me informed regarding the status of my application. I even got my originals back as promised. I am very happy my files are with you guys in WV.

Best Regards,
Michael Brady

03 FEB 07

This is the very first time that I have experienced such professional service from any REC in the past. Well done to your facility and Mr. Sheffler, and I look forward to working with you again in the future.

Best Regards,
Robert J. Tommaselli, MCPO, USN (RET)

01 FEB 07

I submitted my paperwork in Charleston on December 4th and received my license and MMD on February 1st. I think everyone involved did an outstanding job. This is my eighth issue of my license so I speak from experience.

David R. Bell
Relief Captain, Tug Sun Explorer

31 JAN 07

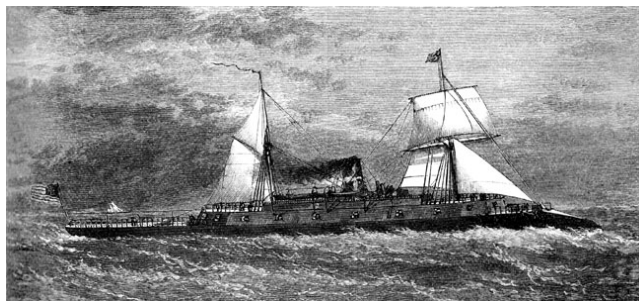
Well pleased with the fast service in getting back my license renewal MMD and the people at the New Orleans REC were very helpful, and really nice people. Very good job!

May God Bless!
Stephen Lantier Jr.

15 JAN 07

The test site in New Orleans could not be any better. I cannot say enough about the ease of convenience and professionalism by your staff there. Especially, CWO David Chapman, he was very professional and a pleasure to deal with.

Robert J. Pilar



Behind the Scenes: RECs Houston and New York

REC Houston

Houston, better known as the Space City, is connected to the water via the Houston Ship Channel a 50-mile long, 45-foot deep waterway connecting the Port of Houston to Galveston Bay. There are about 150 businesses located along the Channel, including oil refineries, freight handling and other heavy industry. The Port of Houston ranks first in the United States in international waterborne tonnage handled. It is closed to private vessels, so sport fishing and recreational boating activities take place in Galveston Bay and further south in the Gulf of Mexico.

The 1914 *USS Texas*, the last remaining dreadnought-era battleship, is docked in the Ship Channel and serves as a memorial and museum. She is one of two remaining ships to have served in both World War I and World War II. Other area attractions include NASA's Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center, the home of Mission Control Operations; and the Houston Astrodome, which was the world's first indoor sports stadium. The Astrodome closed in 2004.

The city of Houston is a humid sub-tropical environment, averaging 100 days a year above 90 degrees. It is the most air-conditioned city in the US. The region is prone to hurricanes, heavy rains and flooding.

Most common licenses? Master of towing vessels, OUPV, Master 100 Ton Inland, and some first-class pilotage.

Most common vessels in port? MODU'S, towing vessels, and deep draft vessels.

REC New York

New York City ranks first as a tourist destination for the United States. The Port of New York ranks third as a commercial port destination.

REC New York is located on the southern tip of Manhattan, 50 feet from the water's edge. Nearly everyone in the office has a view of the Statue of Liberty. The REC is literally in the heart of it all: 15 minutes of walking will get you to the World Trade Center, Wall Street, and the Ferry Slip to the Statue of Liberty. If you aren't in the mood to walk around town, the Staten Island Ferry is a free service that will carry you across New York Bay. The REC is always a few degrees colder than the rest of Manhattan, especially in winter, when the wind is blowing across the water. If there's a nor-easter, it means the parking lot will be swamped at high tide. If there's fog, the horn from the Staten Island Ferry is grating at best after hours of hearing the continuous warning.

The local maritime industry is as diverse as New York. Whether you arrive to work on the Staten Island Ferry, sail into the harbor on a cruise ship, or spend a Saturday shark fishing, there is a good chance REC New York has processed your credential.

Most common licenses? We see mariners who sail tugs, tankers, and commuter ferries. There are also commercial fishing charters, and several pilot organizations that make up most of the everyday customers. The REC also produces credentials for two maritime schools: the United States Merchant Marine Academy and the State University of New York's Maritime College.

Most common vessels in port? Cargo ships, fuel barges and cruise ships.

Favorite local cuisine? It's New York! There are three Starbucks within two blocks of the REC. There are sections of the city named Chinatown, Little Italy, Germantown, Korea Town, etc. Have you ever heard anyone order a Chicago Strip Steak?

